

Analysis of Scene Design Types in Bahram Beyzai's *The Travelers* Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory

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ABSTRACT

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If we accept the theory of conceptual metaphor that the foundation of human thought is metaphorical and language is just one of the representations of conceptual metaphor, we must be able to observe conceptual metaphors in other representations such as still and moving images, sounds and music, gestures and expressions, as well as olfactory and tactile sensations. This study seeks to analyze elements of mise-en-scène in the film "Passengers" by Bahram Beyzaie, focusing on the metaphorical meanings such as composition and arrangement, imagery and gesture, movement, action, and elements like scene lighting or the role of set design in designing the mise-en-scène. The research findings indicate that visual experience leads to the formation of "imaginary" patterns in the human conceptual system; in other words, visual patterns of sensory-perceptual experiences of humans and their interactions with the external world, or, to put it differently, embodied experiences, give rise to conceptualizations used in the film "Passengers" to signify "life and death". In this work, the metaphorical conceptualizations of the film "Passengers" and their related conceptual metaphors directly and indirectly refer to the main content of the work, namely darkness and light as symbols of mourning and life. In fact, in this film, sorrow is represented as darkness, emotional relationship as nutritional substance, death and road as distance are unilaterally represented. In all these unilateral metaphors, only visual signs have been used for representation. Some other metaphors, such as human as a plant, heart as an object, mourning as a place or container, road as a human, objects as living beings, and some abstract concepts as existent entities have also been represented. Combination of auditory signs like music, textual signs, and visual signs has been used to form these metaphors.

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Introduction

Cognitive linguistics has significantly influenced literary and cinematic studies by providing tools to analyze how complex, abstract concepts are understood through concrete, physical experiences. Central to this approach is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by Lakoff and Johnson, which posits that human thought is fundamentally metaphorical. This research examines Bahram Beyzai's acclaimed film *The Travelers* (*Mosaferan*, 1991) through the lens of CMT. The study investigates how cinematic mise-en-scène—encompassing lighting, composition, gesture, movement, and set design—functions as a vehicle for conceptualizing abstract states such as life, death, joy, and grief. The fundamental question addressed is how Beyzai translates the “source domains” of physical reality into the “target domains” of abstract emotional and existential experience.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to interpret the film's visual language. By employing library research and thematic analysis, the study categorizes the metaphors embedded in the film. The analysis focuses on three main pillars: re-conceptualization, modeling, and categorization. The authors examine key visual elements, including the use of mirrors, lighting contrasts, clockwork, and physical positioning of characters, to determine how they serve as physical manifestations of conceptual metaphors (e.g., “Life is a Journey,” “Grief is Darkness”). The research links these visual cues to existing cognitive frameworks to demonstrate how Beyzai's cinematic choices bridge the gap between tangible imagery and abstract meaning.

Results

The analysis reveals that *The Travelers* is built upon a dense network of conceptual metaphors that are visually realized through mise-en-scène:

1. **Grief and Death as Darkness:** The film utilizes low-key lighting and monochromatic color palettes to represent death and mourning. The “Grief is Darkness” metaphor is visually enacted through the

darkening of rooms, the hanging of black curtains, and the replacement of celebratory items with funeral objects, signaling the transition from the light of life to the darkness of death.

۲. **Life is a Journey:** This is identified as the film's central metaphor. Beyzai utilizes the "Path-Source-Goal" image schema to structure the narrative. The road and the movement of the family vehicle serve as the physical anchors for this conceptual mapping, representing human existence as a transitory journey toward an inevitable destination.
۳. **The Mirror as Life/Light:** Mirrors are used as a core symbolic and conceptual tool. In the Iranian cultural context, the mirror signifies light, purity, and life. The breaking of mirrors functions as an ontological metaphor for the fragmentation of dreams and the cessation of life, while the shimmering of a functional mirror in the finale serves as a visual metaphor for the triumph of life and hope.
۴. **Container and Entity Metaphors:** The study identifies "Heart as a Container" (for sorrow and joy), "Time as Motion," and metaphors that treat abstract concepts as living entities (e.g., "Misery is a person that pursues the protagonist"). Additionally, spatial orientation metaphors—such as "Good/Strength is Up" and "Weakness is Down"—are consistently employed through character positioning within the frame.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Beyzai's mise-en-scène is not merely aesthetic but cognitively functional. By utilizing the audience's embodied experiences (e.g., light vs. dark, movement vs. stasis), the director creates a visual language that makes abstract concepts tangible. The study confirms that cinematic mise-en-scène serves as a vital tool for the visual representation of metaphors, enhancing both the emotional depth and the artistic richness of the narrative. *The Travelers* exemplifies how cognitive schemata can be utilized to structure filmic narrative, proving that the film's visual architecture is a direct mapping of the human cognitive system, particularly regarding the conceptualization of life, death, and time.